

Tiara West just might look a little familiar to many, as she is a lifelong Greeley resident and talented woman with a keen interest and desire to be deeply engaged her community through acts of service. It is through that spirit of service that Tiara has come to know so many in our share community, where she volunteers much of her time to make the world a better place, all while seeing the value in The Arc of Weld County's vision of inclusion, acceptance, and belonging for all.

Tiara is a lifelong learner with her deep passion for service stemming from her faith. Each morning, Tiara reflects on how she can be kind to others and devises a plan to do just that. As a grade schooler, Tiara's 3rd grade class learned sign language to music and the experience stuck with her. She quickly became self-taught using VHS tapes, then DVDs, and now YouTube. Her self-taught tech coaching has seen such an evolution with changes in technology over the last decade.

Combining her passion for service and gift of sign, Tiara has become a member of a signing choir for the past 4 years, as well as teaching her day program peers and fellow church members basic sign language. She has also been a volunteer at local nursing facilities since she was in junior high as an activities assistant and in their in-house bistro. Tiara has many goals, but the most pressing may be her goal to better organize her schedule, in hopes to add signing performances at the local nursing facilities to her long list of community engagements. It was this interest better using her email and virtual calendar that sparked her interest in the tech coaching opportunities at The Arc of Weld County.

Additionally, Tiara is very actively involved in several organizations including People First, where she serves as the president since 2020, Friendship Club, and numerous church activities. Her role as the People First of Weld County president requires extensive time for planning their many events and other general clerical duties, such as drafting the agendas, making copies, taking notes during the meetings, all while ensuring the group members can express themselves and their input be tracked.

Tiara first became involved with tech coaching through Code Ninjas gaming and coding classes hosted by The Arc of Weld County in April 2023. She came simply to learn something new and remain connected to her peers. "Each time I went, I gained confidence using computers and creating things." Tiara's technology skills were not the only things that grew, as she also demonstrated personal growth. Tiara is a natural leader, and during her time at Code Ninjas, she was always keeping an eye on her peers, providing tech coaching herself when they were stuck, and advocating for their needs from the facilitator when necessary. Within only a few sessions, Tiara was completing her coding tasks independently and quickly moving around the room to support anyone else in need.

Tiara has an active schedule and managing so many activities has become a problem, particularly when trying to do so on a smartphone. Recently she received a laptop through The Arc of Weld County's Inclusive Technology Fund and participated in tech coaching to sync her smartphone to her Google calendar. The larger computer screen allows Tiara to manage her calendar with ease. "It takes practice and remembering that you have it to help you." Tiara continues to independently work on becoming a master of her schedule, as she is highly motivated to find extra time to do more of the things she loves.

Tiara was supported with one-time demonstrated instruction both at Code Ninjas and when receiving tech coaching regarding her schedule. Specific to coding, Tiara learned to anticipate the next coding need by the natural sequence of the task and at times was able to move ahead of the facilitator.

As Tiara's time at Code Ninjas increased Tiara's self-confidence grew more than she ever realized. The vulnerability of trying something new can be intimidating, but Tiara demonstrated to herself that not only could she learn how to use technology but she could also share her skills with others. She found another calling, much like sign, that allowed her to challenge herself and then in turn share her skills through service to others.

Tiara now understands how to use her smartphone in conjunction with her laptop, as she never goes anywhere without her phone but chooses to leave her laptop at home. She is more efficient with schedules and event planning. Although this most recent tech coaching was just a few months ago, she states she just needs to continue practicing to become more and more proficient.

Tiara is so excited about what the future holds. She has always had big dreams and aspirations to do more for her community and with the tools provided through tech coaching and Inclusive Technology Access with The Arc of Weld County, she knows there is so much more awaiting her. Recent additions to her short list include adding horseback riding to her schedule, improving her performance as a leader within the local People First chapter, expanding her repertoire of songs, and if that wasn't enough, she hopes to create curriculum to teach people with IDD how to sign. Tiara certainly has a very bright and busy future ahead of her.